

Creating a Culturally Prepared Marine Corps

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Creating a Culturally Prepared Marine Corps

Captain Monti Smith

Conference Group 11

304 Galway Lane

Stafford, VA 22554

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A culturally diverse and prepared Marine Corps with a language capability of sufficient diversity and numbers to ensure success on any battle field for any mission will require change.

## **Introduction**

Currently the Marine Corps is facing a crisis with a religious mind-set and culture very different from its own. Additionally there is an increased interactivity between the United States and its foreign allies and its foreign opponents, who often times have languages and cultures that are distinctly different. Present operations in the Middle East highlight these cultural and linguistic shortfalls. With high-level government officials<sup>1</sup> and Marine

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<sup>1</sup>The following quote was taken from Dr. Condoleezza Rice.

*I'm a student of the Cold War.... I also know that we as a country mobilized ourselves not just in the government, but in universities to study the Soviet Union and east European languages, and to send our best and brightest into the study of those societies; that we trained under the National Defense Languages Act thousands of people who could speak and work in Russian and east European languages. And I know that we as a society, leave alone the government, we as a society are not yet mobilized in that way.*

*And so, yes, there's more that the government should do. We should be looking very hard at what new resources are needed. But so should this country be looking. I'm a university professor, I come from a great university. Great universities also ought to be looking at what they're doing to engage the Muslim world, what they're doing to encourage people to study these cultures, what they're doing to train people in these languages. And I'm quite sure that if we, as a country, take on this challenge in the way*

leadership underscoring the need to make changes a new model for cultural training needs to be implemented. This model needs to constitute a diverse professional population with cultural specialists of all ranks and in all Military Occupational Specialties (MOS's). For the Marine Corps to develop cultural depth as a warfighting enabler<sup>2</sup> the following model is presented based on the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' (LDS)<sup>3</sup> missionary program.<sup>4</sup>

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*that we took on the war of ideas in the Cold War, that we're going to succeed.*

United States. White House. Dr. Rice Addresses War on Terror. 19 Aug. 2004. 28 Dec. 2005.  
<<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/08/20040819-5.html>>

<sup>2</sup> The need for a cultural understanding as a warfighting enabler is expressed in these two separate but inclusive ideas:

*So to win a hundred victories in a hundred battles is not the highest excellence, the highest excellence is to subdue the enemy's army without fighting at all.*

*He who knows the enemy and himself  
Will never in a hundred battles be at risk;  
He who does not know the enemy but knows himself  
Will sometimes win and sometimes lose;  
He who knows neither the enemy nor himself  
Will be at risk in every battle.*

Ames, Roger T. "The Art of Warfare." *The Book of War*. Ed. Caleb Carr. Random House: Modern Library NY, 2000. 79-81.

<sup>3</sup> The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is commonly known by several names. In this essay and the supporting documentation you will see it referenced as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, LDS Church and as the Mormon Church, with its members being referred to as Mormons.

<sup>4</sup> Excerpt from a paper presented to the Pennsylvania State Modern Language Association by Allen Weinstein.

## The LDS Model

The missionary program of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints serves as an excellent model to help the Marine Corps achieve both long and short-term cultural goals. The Church's language program when integrated with all aspects of the Church's organization has helped a small misunderstood church of the 1830's<sup>5</sup> grow into a multinational organization located in 165 countries, with approximately 12.3 million members, (5.6 million outside the US), a church curriculum in 185 languages, and global assets estimated in the billions of dollars. Currently the missionary program of the Church has 56,000 missionaries from seventeen different training centers

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*Again, I would like to start from some personal observations, confirmed by conversations with my colleagues. There is one kind of applicant for government employment who consistently displays a not only acceptable but even superior command of foreign languages. Applicants belonging to this group frequently receive better pay in their very first government jobs because of their increased usefulness due to competence in foreign languages. These applicants are Mormons. Members of the faith who have done missionary work overseas consistently come to us as new employees with wholly acceptable commands of the language of the countries in which they have worked, and the contrast between them and the students who have spent one or more years abroad with but inconsistent results in acquiring the language of the host country is worth more than a little attention.*

Weinstein, Allen I. "Foreign Language Majors: The Washington Perspective." Pennsylvania State Modern Language Association. Villa Maria College, Erie, Pennsylvania. 12 Oct. 1974. 28 Dec 2005.  
<http://www.adfl.org/adfl/bulletin/v06n4/064018.htm>

<sup>5</sup> An understanding of LDS history and culture is necessary to fully understand the LDS missionary program and better understand the model that is being presented, unfortunately space does not permit an in depth introduction.

worldwide.<sup>6</sup> After an initial one to two month training period at a Missionary Training Center (MTC) LDS missionaries leave the MTC to serve approximately twenty-two months in a distinct geographic location. Upon completion of the twenty-four month mission the missionary returns home to give a report of his conduct and his official church records are annotated accordingly. The Church's goals and those of the USMC are inherently different and therefore need different solutions. That said taking portions of the LDS model to craft a program to breed cultural experience and understanding is the kind of change needed to advance the Marine Corps' attempts at cultural awareness to a professional program. A program endowed with standards, controllability, flexibility, and the ability to enables warfighters.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> LDS Church statistics are common knowledge and can be found in many places. They can be verified at the Official Web Site of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Official Internet Site of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. 2005. 28 Dec. 2005 <<http://lds.org/>>. <<http://lds.org/newsroom/quickfacts/0,15325,3882-1,00.html>>

<sup>7</sup> Not explored in this essay due to space is an important factor in the success of the LDS model. Attitude. Allen Weinstein recognized this motivating factor and addressed it. A large challenge in implementing the changes recommended in this essay will be the attitude of the Marine Corps. This topic in and of its self is worthy of treatment in its own article.

*There is little in the training background of a Mormon going abroad to complete his or her required missionary work that can adequately explain this observed superior foreign language proficiency upon completion of the overseas experience and return to the United States. The mere fact of overseas residence is also insufficient, for there are*

## **The USMC Model**

The USMC model would be integrated with current language programs headed by the current cultural linguistics center for the Marine Corps at Marine Corps University (Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning). The MCU driven program would have authority over all Marine language and cultural programs. Primarily it would provide the direction, standards, and training of culture and linguistics for all Marines. Over time this entity would reduce any duplication of effort within language programs and ensure there was integration between the different programs throughout the Marine Corps. This program would provide oversight and direction for current Marine programs that are MOS specific, it would also implement a new program that would provide training and cultural immersion for the general populace of the Marine Corps without regard for MOS or aptitude.

The following model is put forward to answer the Commandant's call for a Marine Corps with the "language

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*many people who have lived abroad for even longer than the Mormons' required two years and still have acquired little of the host country's language. So it is nothing as obvious as academic background or physical presence, but rather attitude—a far more subtle thing—which appears to make the difference. But however subtle, this factor may just be the very crux of the entire issue of what is really meant by the acquisition of language proficiency.*

*capabilities in sufficient diversity and numbers to ensure success on the battlefield".<sup>8</sup>*

This program would be a one to two year program for each student, based on language, with an initial one to three month training/preparation period followed by a ten to twenty-two month immersion experience. Initially it will be an all-volunteer program for single Marines. The program would be open for officers and enlisted Marines preferably those that have just completed their initial schooling in the Marine Corps, but not yet attended their MOS school. Marines that volunteer for the program would have to pass a medical screening and a psychic evaluation; after their package is submitted and screened the Marines will receive an acceptance or refusal to the program.<sup>9</sup> The Marines would have to agree to additional service time and extensions of their contracts in conjunction with admittance into the program. Officers and Enlisted Marines would attend the same school, but would not be in the same classes. A slightly different and tailored curriculum would exist for the appropriate audience. The program

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<sup>8</sup> United States. Marine Corps. ALMAR 072/03. 10 Dec. 2003. 28 Dec. 2005 <http://www.usmc.mil/almars/almar2000.nsf/d50a617f5ac75ae085256856004f3afc/952d4b8516b446a585256df8006a75f9?OpenDocument>

<sup>9</sup> At this point I would like to note that language learning has a strong relationship to consistency of effort and other factors not necessary related to intelligence. Consistent daily language study, motivation and humility have a larger impact when mastering communication skills than IQ or aptitude.



needs to be MOS-independent, not a feeder for a particular MOS set. Marines will not have the luxury of choosing the language or geographical location of their assignment, but will be given an assignment based on their initial screening and the needs of the Marine Corps. The preponderance of Marines would be assigned to locations and languages based on the current needs of the Marine Corps, the Middle East, but a portion would be assigned to other locales to create a ready and diverse pool of Marines with the expertise to handle operations in any part of the world.

#### The Immersion Preparation School

Upon the Marines acceptance into the program the Marine will receive orders to the Immersion Preparation School where he or she will receive a one to three month immersion preparation course. If the Marine already speaks the language of his assignment, then he will participate in the shortened version of the course. All other Marines will spend two to three months in the school based on the language of their assignment. The curriculum will be highly regimented with five to fifteen students per class and classes going from 0600 to 2200 every day. Language instruction will start the first night and will be integrated into the classes until the classes are taught in

their entirety in the new language. Classes will consist of instruction in leadership, communication, English grammar, foreign language skills, American history, and foreign culture. Time will be set-aside for Physical Fitness, Marine Corps Martial Arts Program, and the Marine Corps Mentoring Program. A Marine at the immersion prep school will not be allowed leave, liberty, or visitors until the immersion prep course is completed. School completion is not based on any tested or measurable scale, although measures and rewards will exist. The Marine will learn as much as he or she can, as his or her abilities will permit. Mastery of the language at any level is not a requirement for graduation from the preparation school, as the purpose of the school is to prepare the student for the subsequent immersion experience in which the real learning will begin.

#### Marine Immersion Company

Upon completion of the Immersion Preparation School, all students will be sent to a Marine Immersion Company where real language and cultural immersion will take place.<sup>10</sup> An Immersion Company will be led by a major or

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<sup>10</sup> Not all assignments will be to foreign countries; some will be to minority communities within the United States and its ally nations. Two examples are offered as to when this would be necessary. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) would be impossible to safely access. Instead Marines would be assigned to The Republic of

captain who is serving an accompanied Foreign Affairs Officer (FAO) or Regional Affairs Officer (RAO) tour, either as part of his initial cultural training or as a payback tour -See Figure 1 and Figure 2 for outlines of the LDS model and the Marine Immersion Company-. The company commander will have a senior enlisted First Sergeant that is also serving an accompanied tour and a small staff manned by Marines in the program. The company commander will have several platoons that are led by lieutenants that are students in the program. The platoons will be further broken down into squads, and the squads into fire teams, and the fire teams into companionships. Each companionship will have a senior and a junior Marine, with the senior Marine having been in the program for at least six months and having completed his trainer qualification. Platoon commanders will also have officer companionships in which one lieutenant is the platoon commander, senior companion and trainer, while the other is the junior companion and trainee.<sup>11</sup> This organization will be recognizable to the

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Korea (South Korea) and would receive as much of an education as possible on North Korea while living in South Korea. China may also be a difficult country to access directly; however there are many China Towns throughout the US, Canada, and other countries that would be ideal. Minority communities and host nations would serve as assignments for communities and cultures that cannot be accessed directly.

<sup>11</sup> Higher organization is quite flexible. Offices staffed with a LtCol or Maj should be at U.S. Marine Forces Atlantic, Europe, South,

Marines and is necessary for force protection and there will be very strict rules of conduct to include a dress code. In addition there will be daily accountability, weekly fire team and squad training meetings and formations, bimonthly platoon training meetings and formations, and monthly company training meetings and formations.<sup>12</sup>

The Marines of an Immersion Company will have an "occupation" during the day and an "occupation" during the evening. These "occupations" will facilitate language learning and cultural awareness, as real learning and mastery will come from interaction with the native populace, not from book study. Marines will not receive income from their "occupations" and these "occupations" will depend on the arrangements made with the foreign government. "Occupations" could range from business internships to international charities, from multinational organizations to foreign military augmentation. The

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Pacific, and Mobilization Command. These offices would be responsible for all Immersion Companies in their geographic area of responsibility.

<sup>12</sup> Specifics to the day to day life of the Marines have been excluded due to space. In short Marines will have a limited yet regimented daily study program,. More importantly Marines will have to adopt local customs, dress, food, and lifestyle. Dress should distinguish the Marines as young professionals, be of the highest standard, and yet culturally acceptable. Marines will need to live like the local population experiencing both affluent and less affluent lifestyles. They will be taught that they are unofficial ambassadors and represent the US and the Marine Corps. Liberty would be very restrictive.

breadth of possibilities for "occupations" is great and will be driven by the location and the needs of the Marine Corps.

#### **End State**

One in every four Marine will have experience in a foreign language and culture, deduced from one Marine per fire team. The Marine Corps will have a large number of Marines that are culturally familiar with every part of the world, reducing bias and bringing in planners with military depth and cultural understanding. Those Marines that go on to be linguists will have a solid cultural and linguistic base, those that do not will be valuable assets to their units and commands, relieving the Marine Corps of dependence on hired translators and interpreters with mixed loyalties. The Marine Corps will have a ready reserve of expertise available for any situation that arises anywhere in the world. The Marine Corps will be putting men and women back into the civilian world with skills and knowledge that can only improve the cultural awareness of the American population.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> In 1 to 2 years the NCO ranks will be filled with linguists with limited skills (one in twenty). The shape and appearance of the Marine Corps to the civilian world will change, something to separate the Marine Corps from the other services. The junior officer ranks will be quickly filled with company level leaders better prepared to deal with cultural barriers. In 2 to 4 years one in ten Marines will have participated in the program. In 4 to 8 years, some field grade

The FAO and RAO programs would be integrated into the program. While many of the billets needed at MCU and the Immersion Preparation School will be manned with personnel currently assigned to MCU. FOA's and RAO's would fill leadership billets at the Immersion Preparation School and the Immersion Companies, completing their immersion requirements and payback tours. This would also give the FAO's and RAO's leadership opportunities they would not have otherwise. Some program where Marines leave the operating forces will have to be trimmed or eliminated,<sup>14</sup> and a central and organized command that oversees all Marine language and cultural programs will be established and controlled by Marine Corps University.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

By adopting a formal program for cultural training the Marine Corps will be able to develop Marines with the cultural and linguistic tools to become better warfighters. The Marine Corps will be able to modify, track, measure and control the depth, breadth, and composition of culture and language training. The Marine Corps will have a ready

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officers will be graduates of the program. Officers, NCOs, and SNCOs will be teachers and instructors for the next generation. The school program will have expanded and had time to streamline itself. In 8 to 12 years one in every four Marines will have participated in the program.

<sup>14</sup> The time and space are not available in this article to get into an in depth discussion of program priorities and changes.

reserve of culturally diverse personnel for operations in any clime and place. Such a program with formal schooling and set standards is what will elevate cultural and language training to a professional level.

The cultural immersion model demonstrated by the LDS missionary program has proven to be highly effective. If the Marine Corps intends to have a culturally prepared force that serves as a warfighting enabler, then they are going to have to invest the time and the personnel necessary to create a professional level program that can control and direct the training. An immersion program is the simplest and most effective model that can be implemented to bring about positive and sustained change.